

Ministerial Advisory Panel on Infrastructure Call for Evidence

Consultation Questionnaire

https://ulsterbusiness.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cUqpM4JIZOIFj4F

Q1. What should society in NI seek to achieve from infrastructure and why is it important?

Well managed, planned and sustainable infrastructure can support the ambition of regional policy. Regional policy (the Regional Development Strategy 2035) recognises the importance of infrastructure to support sustainable growth and this is reflected at a local level in Belfast. The Belfast Agenda highlights the importance of appropriate sustainable development to make the city competitive and to connect people to opportunities. Fundamental to creating the conditions for and enabling this inclusive growth, is infrastructure.

The Belfast Agenda also recognises that there are gaps in Belfast's key infrastructure which must be addressed if the city is to grow. The Agenda identifies that infrastructure planning for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way and a core goal of the Agenda is to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure.

The infrastructure investment should be targeted to release the greatest economic potential and support development that provides the opportunity to sustainably increase GVA and the ability of the region to compete internationally.

Q2. How do you see infrastructure needs and demands changing over the long term?

Globally, there are several recognised key drivers and emerging trends which influence infrastructure needs and shape methods of infrastructure delivery both now and in the future. It is assumed that many of these will also relate to Northern Ireland in some form. These key drivers and emerging trends include:

- Population, housing and employment growth
- Changing working and shopping / spending patterns
- Changing demographics – aging population - increasing demand for homes + smaller household sizes
- Urban densification and regeneration – desire for city centre living
- A changing climate and decarbonisation
- Increasing recognition of the value of the environment to the economy and social well-being
- Importance of improving air quality
- Increasing efficiencies of infrastructure
- Behavioural change
- Increasing digitalisation
- New technologies, artificial intelligence and automation
- Increasing use of smart technologies and environments – disruptive technologies
- Ultra-low emissions vehicles
- Decarbonisation agenda
- Brexit
- Covid-19

Q3. What works and what doesn't work in the current system of infrastructure decision making and delivery?

The majority of Northern Ireland infrastructure has suffered from long-term under-investment resulting in the need for significant investment in key infrastructure provision including waste water, rail, and sustainable and active travel. There is a need for a longer-term regional prioritised infrastructure strategy and updated integrated localised strategic plans such as Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan and Living With Water Programme. These strategic documents should provide a holistic and prioritised approach to the delivery of NI infrastructure and be considered in the context of a realistic funding model to achieve the level of infrastructure required to enable the region to continue to grow and to compete effectively.

The strategies should also provide for infrastructure delivery based on a place-making approach, taking into account local and regional social and economic developments, and enabling and encouraging innovation and new solutions to complex infrastructure issues.

There needs to be an approach that ensures or helps support a process where infrastructure investment decisions can be made, and to ensure delivery on a long-term basis that sits beyond the standard political decision making timescales.

Q4. Do you have any comments on how infrastructure decisions are currently made in Northern Ireland? Would you propose any potential reforms to the current decision making process? How could these reforms be best achieved?

Infrastructure decision should be made in line with a prioritised and agreed delivery strategy that takes into account social and economic change, demands and the longer term return from the investment in terms of growth and sustainability. While political oversight is required, expert independent advice and guidance can help ensure that the infrastructure prioritisation is undertaken based on delivering the sustainable infrastructure requirements of the region as a whole, encouraging sustainable development and promoting the region to grow and to compete effectively.

An approach to longer term strategy development and associated Infrastructure Plans that are subject to regular review and monitoring in relation to the longer term aspirations and outcomes on which they are based.

Q5. The Ministerial Advisory Panel have been asked to develop a proposal that will identify the specific role and value of a Commission and how it might be established and might operate. The next set of questions will test the viability of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland. Would you support the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission in Northern Ireland?

Yes. An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission that is transparent and accountable, focusing on strategic prioritisation and delivery could bring value. If the focus is clearly on developing a strategy which will incorporate an infrastructure plan with associated delivery in the form of projects and priorities to improve both the quality and impact of infrastructure development. As suggested in the circulated research it needs to move beyond the consideration or management of individual risks or assets (beyond just DfI aspects), to the systems as a whole.

Q6. What value would an Infrastructure Commission bring to Northern Ireland?

An independent, expert-led Infrastructure Commission could add value by;

- Offering independent expert advice to government
- providing a challenge role in the reviewing of proposed infrastructure projects
- Helping to prioritise and develop Infrastructure Plans with the ongoing monitoring of delivery
- Helping to prioritise infrastructure projects

- Conducting expert reviews of ongoing projects to keep them on track
- Increasing accountability and transparency

Q7. How might the Infrastructure Commission be established and operate? (Pick one or more options)

Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy

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| Independent, focussing on Prioritisation and Strategy |
| Independent organisation, facilitating public debate |
| Government led |
| Independent organisation, focusing on individual projects or programmes |

Q8. What scope do you believe the Infrastructure Commission could / should have?

- Hard infrastructure (water & waste, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure)
- Digital Infrastructure
- Energy Infrastructure
- Housing Infrastructure

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| Hard infrastructure (water & waste, drainage and inland waterways, public transport, roads and cycling infrastructure) |
| Digital infrastructure |
| Energy infrastructure |
| Housing infrastructure |
| Education and Health infrastructure |

Q9. What time period should an Infrastructure Commission focus on?

20-30 years linked to regional strategies

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|--------------------|
| Less than 20 years |
| 20 - 30 years |
| 30 - 40 years |
| 40 - 50 years |
| More than 50 years |

Q10. The Infrastructure Minister aims to deliver cleaner, greener, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. How could an Infrastructure Commission support these objectives?

An Infrastructure Commission can provide benefit through independent oversight and guidance of emerging plans and delivery projects to ensure the maximum benefit in delivering green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure. The panel should also be suitably qualified to provide the expertise in best practice and learning from international infrastructure delivery and city growth.

The approach for the Commission should not be about seeking to provide for all the future infrastructure needs upfront, it should develop the capacity or processes for identifying and planning the trigger points or indicators that will point towards new or upgraded infrastructure requirements at the appropriate times, ensuring that the infrastructure can be operational when they are reached alongside the collaboration needed to achieve such an integrated model.

Q11. What specific role should a Commission play in NI?

An Infrastructure commission in NI can provide an oversight and challenge role, and provide strategic advice and knowledge on the development and delivery of infrastructure policy and projects in NI to ensure effective, sustainable and efficient delivery of the infrastructure requirements.

As noted above there needs to be an approach that ensures or helps support a process where infrastructure investment decisions can be made and ensure delivery on a long-term basis that sits beyond the standard political decision making timescales.

Q12. What is the minimum project value (£m) that the Infrastructure Commission should be engaged at (if it is involved at project level)?

£30m

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Minimum project value

Q13. What stage of the infrastructure lifecycle should the Infrastructure Commission be involved in?

The infrastructure commission should be involved in the early process of strategic planning and the prioritisation of strategic project delivery. The commission should also have a challenge/ oversight role in the delivery of infrastructure projects to ensure adherence to, and delivery of green, sustainable and inclusive infrastructure in the delivery of the longer-term aspirations and outcomes.

Q14. To what extent do you think that the Commission should be tasked to hold Government to account?

As an independent body the Commission should have the authority to challenge and to provide advice on infrastructure delivery and prioritisation. The commission should through the strategy development be able to provide recommendations to the infrastructure delivery bodies, and to the NI Executive / Committee for Infrastructure.

Q15. There is a lot of ongoing debate around procurement issues at the minute. Should the Infrastructure Commission engage on procurement issues?

Yes, including providing advice and experience on funding options and routes to procurement.

Q16. If created, should an Infrastructure Commission be responsible to;

NI Executive – accountable directly to the Infrastructure Minister or Finance Minister

Q17. Which international Infrastructure Commission model do you think is most appropriate for Northern Ireland? Please provide your reasons for selection and deselection. Please note that a summary of each of these models is contained within Appendix G.

The Independent Strategy & Prioritisation Organisation model would be the most appropriate fit for NI. The models provided for Australia and the internal states provide for a remit for the setting the policy agenda on long-term opportunities for infrastructure and evaluating business cases for nationally significant investment proposals. The 'place based' approach on infrastructure planning, providing advice to government, industry and communities allows for a wider approach to infrastructure delivery, taking into account wider societal and economic considerations rather than the typical siloed or political led infrastructure decision making process. The long term 30yr infrastructure strategy of Infrastructure Victoria with a 5yr Infrastructure Plan Projects Pipeline allows for long term prioritised planning with a focused approach on short-medium term delivery.

Q18. Do you have any additional comments on how the Infrastructure Commissioners role should operate in regard to Stakeholder engagement and any recommendation or evidence of best practice on how this can be achieved?

In its approach to stakeholder engagement, an Infrastructure Commission should acknowledge the importance of focused consultation within key infrastructure sectors, but also the need for cross-sectoral engagement that recognises the relationships (direct and indirect) between different sectors, and the value of interagency working in understanding issues and their impact, and in identifying synergies that can drive efficiency in the delivery of sustainable infrastructure solutions.

Stakeholder engagement by a Commission should reflect the far-reaching impacts of infrastructure decisions and enable integrated consultation, and decision making, that directly links city priorities such as connectivity and climate change, which have direct relevance to the city's infrastructure.

The Belfast Agenda is the first interagency plan for the city, and identifies that infrastructure planning for Belfast needs to be taken forward in a strategic and integrated way, with a core goal of the Agenda being to create a partnership and plan for sustainable urban infrastructure. An interagency approach to infrastructure that identifies cross-cutting themes and complementary interventions should aim to support sustainable and inclusive growth to 2035 as outlined in the Belfast Agenda.

The Local Development Plan 'Draft Plan Strategy' also recognises that cross-sectoral infrastructure planning is integral to the day to day operation and socio-economic sustainability of the city, which should be reflected in the approach to engagement and consultation.

The role of a future Infrastructure Commission should include consideration of factors which fall outside the immediate remit of the Department for Infrastructure, and timely stakeholder engagement

across sectors including for example, social infrastructure, and green and blue infrastructure will be necessary.

The 'Infrastructure Commission for Scotland- Appendix G' refers to the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) as working across the infrastructure system to 'counteract siloed working', and notes the value of consultation around individual projects, and the broader infrastructure strategy or plan within which they sit.

In this context, a Commission for Northern Ireland should explore stakeholder engagement options relating to independent long-term advice, including organisations which work with, but sit independent of or outside of, government and are either instrumental in the delivery of independent and long-term advice or provide a vehicle for comprehensive public engagement.